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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, January 31, 1941.

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SUBJECT: "GUIDES TO BUYING MEAT." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, and the Agricultural Marketing Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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What I have to say today concerns Government meat grading. I have some information about the way meat is graded by Federal graders--about the kinds of meat that are graded--and the purple grade stamp and just exactly what it means.

But first, let me describe the purple grade stamp--in case you've never looked at it closely.

The grade stamp shows up best on large cuts of meat--on a quarter of beef, for instance--or a saddle of lamb. On a large cut, the stamp looks something like a narrow, pale purple ribbon. But if you look at this ribbon closely you'll see that really it is made up of a lot of letters and words--or rather the same letters and words printed over and over again. They are repeated often, so that every retail cut will bear the grade designation.

And here's what you see when you get a close-up view of a section of this purple ribbon. On the first line of each stamp are printed the initials U. S. Next, below that, is printed the grade name--for example, if the meat is choice, or good, or commercial grade.... And then, every so often, you'll see the initials AMS. Those are the initials of the Agricultural Marketing Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture--the agency in charge of all Federal meat grading for quality.

I'm describing this grade stamp in detail, because it is so easy to confuse this quality grade stamp with another stamp put on meat by the Federal Government. This other stamp is the inspection stamp. The inspection stamp shows that the meat has passed inspection and has been found to be wholesome food. In other words,

the inspection stamp shows that the food is safe and all right to eat. The grade stamp shows the quality of the particular piece.

Both the grade stamp and the inspection stamp are purple. But you can tell them apart because the inspection stamp is round in shape and it is not stamped on the meat in so many places as is the grade stamp.

Incidentally, both these stamps are of a harmless vegetable coloring matter. So you needn't cut either off the meat before you cook it.

But so much for the appearance of the grade stamp. Now a bit about what it stands for. I'm quoting some of the facts about this Federal meat grading service that have been gathered by the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

"Three kinds of meat are graded regularly. These are beef--lamb--and veal. There is no regular pork-grading service for the consumer trade, because a large percentage of the pork produced in this country doesn't vary much in quality."

"Today, Government graded meat is available in most large cities and in many towns from coast to coast. Government graders are stationed in 27 key meat-packing cities over the country, so that practically every dealer in meat can buy Federally graded meat if he wants it."

If you are just getting acquainted with the meat grades, I suggest that you become familiar with the beef grades first. For beef is more difficult than most meats for the buyer to judge. There's more beef sold than there is lamb or veal and naturally more beef is graded. And anyway, once you learn the beef grades, you'll know the grades for lamb and veal, because the grade names are identical.

"The beef grades you'll find on the market mostly are choice, good and commercial. There is a top grade, prime, above choice but that goes to the hotels and restaurants catering to the luxury trade. And there are three grades below commercial, but you won't see much of those either.

"Ordinarily, butchers keep only one of the meat grades on hand. Choice, the highest grade you'll find on the market, has a moderately thick covering of white or creamy white fat. The lean meat is bright in appearance and well-marbled with fat. That is, there is quite a bit of fat scattered through the lean, in flecks and tiny streaks--called marbling by the meat experts.

"Next grade below choice is good. Good beef is used most widely by those who want quality at a moderate price. The fat covering on this beef is thinner, and the cut surface of the lean shows some marbling of fat.

"Commercial beef, the next grade below good, has very little if any excess fat. The fat covering is thin, and the cut lean meat shows practically no marbling of fat.

"There are many other differences also in the grades of meat--but for the most part they can be seen only by expert meat judges."

And now, just a word about food values. The Bureau of Home Economics says it's important to remember when you're buying meat by grade, that grade does not affect food values. Every one of the meat grades can be a good "buy" if you know how to get the best out of it by proper cooking.

"For instance, a top round or a rump steak from a choice grade of beef will be tender enough and have enough fat on it to make it an excellent piece to broil. But this same steak from a commercial grade would be better made up into a Swiss steak with some added moisture and a lid on the pan to keep in the steam and help soften the connective tissue. But both make equally nourishing food."

And that's all the information on meat grading that I have time for today. If you would like to read up on the beef grading service of the Department of Agriculture, you'll find the facts in a little publication released recently. The title of this is "Buying Beef by Grade". It's Miscellaneous Publication No. 392 of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. You can get copies of "Buying Beef By Grade" free by writing to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

